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The Impacts of Terror Management and Self-Monitoring on Religiosity

By

Caitlin Silvia

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ABSTRACT

SILVIA, CAITLIN The impacts of terror management and self-monitoring on religiosity.

ADVISOR: Ken DeBono

Previous research has shown that the cultural worldview a person holds has an impact on his or her attitudes and behaviors throughout life. Terror management theory posits that this worldview functions as a cultural anxiety-buffer from the overwhelming anxiety and terror that results from a person becoming aware of his or her own mortality. In particular, terror management theory suggests that there is a master motive behind religion, and that when placed in a mortality salience condition, a person's beliefs and worldview will strengthen. Another personality variable that requires a strong worldview or framework is self-monitoring, which allows a person to use his or her attitudes as guides for subsequent behavior. High self-monitors base their actions on situational information, while low self-monitors strive to act based on their true attitudes. The current study tried to determine if terror management's impact on religiosity could be moderated by self-monitoring. Participants were classified as high or low self-monitors, put in the control or mortality salience condition, and then answered questions concerning their levels of religiosity. The results were not significant, but the patterns of means were in the predicted direction.

The Impacts of Terror Management and Self-Monitoring on Religiosity

The individual differences between people's attitudes, beliefs, and actions have been studied for years, and it seems that unseen or unconscious factors constantly play a role. How does a man decide which worldview to hold? Why does a woman instinctively dislike someone who challenges her political beliefs? Why do some attitudes seem to stay relatively the same, while others change quickly in different situations? A person's cultural worldview clearly serves many purposes and impacts every area of his or her life. Relatively little was known about the forces that promote allegiance to certain cultural worldviews until Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, and Lyon (1989) proposed terror management theory, which has become a very highly researched area in psychology.

Terror management theory suggests that cultural conceptions of reality function as buffers against the anxiety that is a result of the awareness of human vulnerability and mortality (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Thus, people are highly motivated to maintain faith in their own cultural worldviews and to defend their beliefs against any threats they encounter. During evolution, sophisticated human intellectual abilities led to an awareness of human vulnerability and mortality, creating the potential for overwhelming and crippling terror. Cultural worldviews also began to develop during this time. Because the potential for terror impacted these worldviews, any worldview that was to survive had to provide a means to manage and lessen this terror (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). A culture's reality therefore became its cultural anxiety-buffer in order to protect its members.

According to terror management theory, this buffer can only be effective if a person achieves a sense of self-esteem from his or her culture, as the culture only

promises protection and security to the people that live up to the cultural standards of value (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). A person hoping to receive the benefits of this buffer must believe in the validity of the worldview and its related values and standards, and also that he or she is meeting or exceeding these standards. A cultural worldview can allow a person to see himself or herself as a valuable participant in a meaningful world, but only if the buffer is constantly bolstered and protected from outside threats. Every day, people are faced with reminders about their own deaths and vulnerability, and their buffers are susceptible to threats from incoming information. Worldviews also require continual social validation, making a person more likely to respond positively towards those who bolster or reinforce his or her anxiety buffer and negatively towards those who threaten or disagree with it (Rosenblatt et al., 1989).

In their first experiment, Rosenblatt et al. (1989) investigated the idea that, when mortality was made salient, participants would respond more positively towards those who held the same worldviews and more negatively towards those who deviated from their worldviews. Specifically, they asked court judges to set bond for an alleged prostitute using the same methods they would usually use to make these judgments. Prostitution was chosen due to the fact that it emphasized the moral nature of the crime, and the violation of cultural norms (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Immediately before being presented with the details of the case, mortality was made salient to half of the judges. The judges in the mortality salience condition were asked to fill out a questionnaire that asked about their thoughts and feelings concerning their own death. Finally, participants were asked to set bond for the alleged prostitute.

Rosenblatt et al. (1989) predicted that the judges in the mortality salience condition would demand a higher bond than those in the control condition, as people who are made aware of their mortality tend to be especially punitive towards those who violate their worldviews. The researchers found that reminding participants of their mortality led to the recommendation of higher bonds for the alleged prostitutes. They ultimately attributed this finding to the aspect of terror management theory that suggests that moral principles are part of the anxiety buffer that protects individuals from the terror concerning their own mortality. Going against these moral principles threatens the integrity of the buffer and causes the person to react negatively towards the transgressor. One of the major revelations from this early study into terror management theory was that even court judges who have undergone extensive legal training to remain wholly unbiased are still susceptible to the effects stemming from terror management mechanisms (Rosenblatt et al., 1989).

Arndt, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1997) also applied terror management theory to assess its influences on people's judgments of others. Specifically, the researches wanted to ascertain if unconscious concerns about death motivated allegiance to cultural beliefs, as a significant amount of information processing and self-regulatory activity seems to occur outside of conscious awareness. Arndt et al. (1997) examined the effects of subliminal presentation of death-related stimuli on responses to people who bolstered or threatened the subject's cultural worldview. Because mortality salience usually produces a defense of the worldview, the researchers hypothesized that subjects would like the people who supported their worldviews more than they would like those who threatened it (Ardnt et al., 1997).

The study's cultural worldview defense assessment and the accessibility of death thoughts assessment were conducted in separate sessions in order to ensure that accessibility was not artificially increased because of the assessment. In the accessibility stage, participants were subliminally exposed to the word "death" or the word "field" repeatedly, then filled out a measure of the accessibility of death-related thoughts (Ardnt et al., 1997). In the cultural worldview phase, subjects first completed the typical mortality salience task or an exam-salient control task. Participants were then exposed to subliminal messages of either "death" or "field," depending on the condition they were in. Lastly, all participants evaluated pro-American essays and anti-American essays, and indicated to what extent they found the author likable, intelligent, and knowledgeable. The results showed that participants who were subliminally exposed to the word "death" had higher rates of death-related thoughts They were also more likely to rate the author who supported their worldview as more likable, knowledgeable, and intelligent, and gave the author who contradicted their worldviews lower scores on all measures. These findings suggest the participants' defense of the cultural worldview, which supported the idea that death-related thoughts have the greatest effects when they are outside of conscious awareness (Arndt et al., 1997).

Rosenblatt et al.'s (1989) and Arndt et al.'s (1997) studies showed how much a cultural worldview that results from the cultural anxiety-buffer can permeate every area of a person's life. These studies imply that this worldview will remain relatively stable as long as a person is receiving continuous social validation from it. One area where terror management theory has been more extensively studied is religion. Terror management theory suggests that there may be a master motive behind religion, with religious beliefs

amplifying the cultural anxiety-buffer that prevents the terror and anxiety that comes from understanding and being aware of human mortality (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). As people's mortalities become more salient, they become more motivated to maintain their faith. The potential for overwhelming and crippling terror is constant, and religion is just one aspect of the cultural worldview that helps alleviate some of this fear. Research on terror management theory has consistently demonstrated that people placed in a mortality salience condition tend to make a stronger endorsement of their own worldview afterwards (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). In sum, terror management theory suggests that the motive behind all religious beliefs is to abate fear associated with a person's own mortality, and that when placed in a mortality salience condition, a person's beliefs and worldviews will strengthen.

In their study on the link between terror management theory and religion, Jonas and Fischer (2006) examined the relationship between religiosity and worldview defense in regards to the November 2003 terrorist attacks in Istanbul. The researchers chose to study terrorist attacks as they tend to induce fear, anxiety, and concern about death (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). Participants were either in high or low mortality salience conditions. The high mortality salience condition occurred immediately after the attacks, while the low mortality salience condition took place a week later. Jonas and Fischer (2006) hypothesized that after the terrorist attacks, religious people were likely to affirm their religion in order to cope with the threat of terrorism.

All of the participants were German, and first read a description of the attacks that took place in Istanbul. Next, they were asked to answer questions regarding the likelihood that a similar attack would occur in Germany, then filled out a religious

orientation scale that measured both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity occurs when a person strives for meaning and value, internalizing his or her religious beliefs and letting them provide motivation and direction. Extrinsic religiosity refers to the extent to which a person uses religion to fulfill a utilitarian purpose and to obtain other ends, such as social status, security, or comfort (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). To measure the dependent variable of worldview defense, subjects were presented with eight summaries of articles concerning terrorist attacks, with four saying that it was highly unlikely that attacks would occur in Germany and four stating the opposite. They were asked to evaluate each summary and indicate how interested they would be in reading the whole article at the end of the study.

Jonas and Fischer (2006) found that people low in intrinsic religiousness reacted with strong worldview defense immediately following the terrorist attacks. People high in intrinsic religiousness did not react with the same level of worldview defense, which the researchers attributed to the idea that the affirmation of intrinsic religious beliefs serves a terror management function (Jonas & Fischer, 2006). As people high in intrinsic beliefs are constantly reaffirming their views, they do not have the same need to defend their worldview in the face of mortality salience. The participants in the low mortality salience condition did not have the same results, possibly because the terrorist attacks were not as fresh in their minds and they had already had time to process what had happened.

Another aspect of terror management theory to consider in conjunction with religion is the formation of in-group biases and out-group hostilities. The worldview that a person holds will usually be defended at all costs. A person often needs validation from others that his or her worldviews are the correct ones, thus making social consensus an

important process (Cohen, Jussim, Harber, & Bhasin, 2009). Cohen et al. (2009) assessed the relationship between terror management theory and anti-Semitism, basing their hypothesis on the idea that people prefer ideas and other people that conform to their own worldview (Arndt et al., 1997). Cohen et al. (2009) predicted that a mortality salience condition would increase anti-Semitism, which would manifest itself as higher levels of hostility towards Israel.

The researchers wanted to reduce some of the problems associated with questionnaires, so they created a bogus pipeline manipulation in order to prevent some of the intentional lies or distortions that occur when participants want to appear unprejudiced. Some subjects were led to believe that their underlying attitudes and assumptions were transparent, so they should not attempt to hide them, while others were led to believe that their underlying thoughts were private, so deception was possible. Because of this manipulation, Cohen et al. (2009) also hypothesized that mortality salience effects on anti-Semitism and attitudes towards Israel would be more apparent when participants believed that they could not hide their biases. Participants were either asked to think about their own deaths or about an upcoming exam. Those in the prejudice obvious condition were told that the study was concerned with biases and prejudice, and since participants knew the "purpose" of the experiment, they could hide their socially unacceptable attitudes. Subjects in the bogus pipeline condition were told that the study was looking at attitudes, and it was implied that the researchers would be able to tell if the subjects were lying or not.

Questionnaires on anti-Semitism, attitudes towards Israel, and attitudes towards Palestine were administered. The questionnaire regarding Palestine was included to

determine whether the mortality salience manipulation affected levels of support for both Israelis and Palestinians, or if was unique to Israeli sentiment (Cohen et al., 2009). The researchers found support for their hypotheses, in that the combination of mortality salience and the fear of being caught lying to appear unprejudiced increased expression of anti-Semitism in their participants (Cohen et al., 2009). The subjects who were in the prejudice obvious condition were able to alter their responses to appear less prejudiced than they actually were. The results of this study support the idea that terror management theory induces in-group biases and out-group hostilities. Cohen et al. (2009) showed that as anti-Semitism increased, so did hostility towards Israel, especially when participants believed they would be caught lying. Social desirability tends to manifest itself in subtle ways, making it more difficult to hide. The mortality salience condition caused participants to strengthen their in-group allegiance and increase hostility toward the out-group. This study implied that hostility towards Israel may serve as a cover for anti-Semitism, and that social desirability is an important factor when considering prejudice, as prejudice is highly stigmatized (Cohen et al., 2009).

Since religious beliefs have been repeatedly implicated in the terror management process, Friedman (2006) performed a study involving religious fundamentalism and attitudes towards death. Specifically, he wanted to conduct linguistic analyses to assess the language used to describe the emotions and events surrounding one's death, and to investigate how fundamentalism impacted responses to control and mortality salience conditions. He chose linguistic analysis because it can help demonstrate the link between religiosity and attitudes about death, but also the specific links between religiosity and responses to mortality salience (Friedman, 2006). Responses in mortality salience essays

are unrestrained, and can help give researchers insight into the most critical aspects of people's beliefs.

Friedman (2006) hypothesized that higher levels of religious fundamentalism would impact subjects' essay responses in the mortality salience condition but not in the control condition. Participants were either asked to write about the emotions and events surrounding their own deaths or the emotions and events surrounding the experience of dental pain. They then filled out other measures that were not relevant to the study but allowed for terror management mechanisms to be activated (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). After completing the filler tasks, participants answered a religious fundamentalism questionnaire. Friedman (2006) analyzed the linguistic content of the participants' essays, including psychological processes, affective and emotional processes, personal concerns, and linguistic dimensions. He found that religious fundamentalism was consistently linked to the linguistic choices participants made when writing about their own deaths. In the mortality salience condition, cognitive complexity decreased as religious fundamentalism increased (Friedman, 2006).

In the essays concerning their own deaths, fundamentalists used less conditional and tentative language, and also used terms relating to inclusion rather than exclusion. This finding supports the idea that more strictly religious individuals think in less elaborate, sophisticated, and complicated ways about issues that implicate their faith (Friedman, 2006). This may explain why religious beliefs seem to strengthen in the face of information that could undermine these beliefs. These results also offer further support for Rosenblatt et al.'s (1989) and Cohen's (2009) findings involving in-group biases, as

the findings suggest that high fundamentalists view their deaths as having greater social implications that low fundamentalists do.

When faced with thoughts of their own mortalities, people will do almost anything to buffer themselves against the intense fear and anxiety that come with these thoughts. Renkema, Stapel, and van Yperen (2007) further investigated in-group biases by looking at terror management in conjunction with conformity. They predicted that, when reminded of his or her own death, a person would tend to base his or her views on the opinions of others (Renkema et al., 2007). This hypothesis was based on the idea that conformity is determined by the need for accurate social information and the need to social approval. As a terror management mechanism, conformity might allow a person to construct a coherent worldview and feel like a valuable member of his or her culture (Renkema et al., 2007).

Participants were randomly assigned to the mortality salience condition, where they were asked to write about their feelings associated with their own deaths, or to the control condition, where they wrote about their thoughts associated with watching television. Subjects were then asked to rate how much they liked different abstract drawings. There were popularity ratings below every drawing that showed what percentage of the population liked, disliked, or were neutral concerning that particular drawing. Renkema et al. (2007) found that participants who had been in the mortality salience condition tended to conform to the in-group, and follow the general population's ratings of the drawings. This effect was especially apparent with the drawings that received highly positive ratings, but it was also seen to a lesser degree with the drawings that were rated negatively. Renkema et al.'s (2007) study demonstrated that people do not

necessarily stick to their own beliefs when faced with their mortality. Instead, they tend to go with the flow and conform to others' beliefs. Studies concerned with terror management theory all seem to conclude that there is a master motive behind religion as part of a larger cultural worldview, and that both serve the purpose of buffering some of the anxiety and overwhelming fear associated with contemplating one's own death.

Another personality variable that requires a strong worldview or framework is self-monitoring. Rosenblatt et al.'s (1989) research suggested that terror management theory necessitates having a set of worldviews that receive social validation and remain relatively stable. Worldviews vary from culture to culture, but they consistently provide the universe with meaning, order, and value (Greenberg et al., 1990). They provide a context within which individuals can acquire a sense of value or self-esteem. In terror management theory, the existence of others with different worldviews increases the individual's need for validation of his or her own worldview. Self-monitoring is an individual personality variable that allows a person to use his or her attitudes and beliefs as guides for his or her behavior. It can be connected to terror management theory because worldviews continuously influence a person's subsequent attitudes and behaviors in both terror management and self-monitoring.

A person in a social setting attempts to behave appropriately for the given situation, relying on cues to situational guidelines of appropriateness and information about inner states and attitudes (Snyder & Tanke, 1976). People are classified as being high or low in self-monitoring based on which sources of information they rely on more frequently. High self-monitors tend to rely on the situational information, and therefore change their actions from situation to situation. On the other hand, low self-monitors rely

almost entirely on their own personalities and attitudes to decide how to act. They base their decisions on their inner states, rather than on situational social cues or expectations (Snyder & Tanke, 1976). In sum, low self-monitors believe that what they do and what they believe are the same, while high self-monitors understand that their actions and beliefs do not necessarily have to be congruent all of the time.

Snyder and Tanke (1976) assessed how the different levels of self-monitors reacted to counterattitudinal arguments. Participants were allowed to choose to write an essay that agreed with affirmative action programs or one that disagreed with them, and were then convinced to write counterattitudinal essays concerning the issue. After writing the essays, their personal attitudes on the situation were recorded. Snyder and Tanke (1976) predicted that low self-monitors would be more likely to change their attitudes after writing counterattitudinal essays, while high self-monitors would have a bigger discrepancy between their actions and their actual beliefs. The researchers also hypothesized that there would be no differences between those who were assigned to the no-choice condition and those in the control group, where they did not have to write an essay at all.

Snyder and Tanke (1976) found that self-monitoring was unrelated to the essay position that the participants chose, but it did determine the relationship between counterattitudinal behavior and true attitudes. Low self-monitors had a greater association between the essay they chose to write and their actual attitudes. Snyder and Tanke's (1976) study showed just how strong the relationship is between behavior and attitude, and that low self-monitors usually attribute their behaviors to their dispositions, while high self-monitors almost always attribute their actions to their current situations.

Subsequent studies applying Snyder and Tanke's (1976) findings have focused on the idea that attitudes based on direct experience are more predictive of future behavior than those formed through indirect means (Zanna, Olson, & Fazio, 1980). People who express attitudes that reflect past behaviors and predict future behaviors are those whose past behaviors have been relatively consistent and who base their attitudes on their behaviors. Zanna et al. (1980) proposed an individual difference perspective for looking at attitude-behavior consistency, with low self-monitors whose past behaviors towards the target object have been relatively unchangeable having greater attitude-behavior consistency than either high self-monitors or low self-monitors whose past behaviors towards the object have varied.

Zanna et al.'s (1980) study took place in two sessions. In the first session, subjects answered several questionnaires, including one assessing their attitudes towards religion. They also filled out a self-monitoring scale. In the second session, which occurred one month later, participants filled out self-reports of their religious activities and other behaviors pertaining to religion that they had performed since the last session. Each subject was classified as either a high or low self-monitor and as high or low on the past behavioral variability scale (Zanna et al., 1980). The researchers' hypothesis was supported, with low self-monitors with low variability in past behavior showing the highest correlation in attitude-behavior consistency. Zanna et al. (1980) interpreted these findings as signifying that low self-monitors who consider their behavior reflective of their attitudes, who infer their attitudes from their behavior, and whose behavior has been relatively invariable in the past have attitudes that are most predictive of their future behavior. If low self-monitors' past behaviors and attitudes showed high levels of

religiosity, Zanna et al.'s (1980) findings suggest that these actions would continue in the future, while high self-monitors' beliefs and actions would most likely change in regards to the situation at hand.

Snyder and Kendzierski (1982) also looked at the impact of situations on attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, they were concerned with the activities that individuals use to create, promote, and enforce correspondence between their attitudes and their behaviors (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982). The researchers believed that people essentially choose the interpersonal situations that they find themselves in, and that these choices may reflect features of their self-conceptions, including attitudes. By choosing situations that will dispose them to perform the actions implied by their attitudes, people may reinforce correspondence between their attitudes and behaviors. Snyder and Kendzierski (1982) believed that self-monitoring may play a role in this attitude-behavior relationship, with low self-monitors placing more value on congruent attitudes and behaviors, making their behavior more likely to reflect their attitudes and intentions. On the other hand, high self-monitors tailor their behaviors to the situations they are in, and this impression management usually creates contradictions between their true attitudes and their outward behaviors (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982).

Because of these self-monitoring differences, Snyder and Kendzierski (1982) predicted that it would be low self-monitoring subjects who would choose to enter and spend time in situations that would cause them to behave in accordance with their attitudes. In their study, participants were able to choose whether or not to enter a situation that provided support for the expression of attitudes that favored affirmative action. Snyder and Kendzierski (1982) looked at the relationship between a subject's

attitude towards affirmative action and his or her willingness to enter the social situation, hypothesizing that low self-monitors with favorable attitudes towards affirmative action would be more willing to enter and spend time in the situation than low self-monitors with unfavorable attitudes towards it. They also predicted that high self-monitors' willingness to enter the situation would not be significantly related to their attitudes towards affirmative action (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982).

An experimenter contacted each participant by telephone and extended an invitation to him or her to watch a videotape that showed women and minorities discussing the implications of affirmative action. After, the participant would be asked to discuss with a group what affirmative action programs would mean for both women and minorities. Thus, the experimenter allowed each subject to choose whether or not to enter a social situation that would promote the expression of favorable attitudes towards affirmative action (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982). The researchers found support for their hypotheses, with low self-monitors who had favorable attitudes towards affirmative action being significantly more likely to accept the invitation than low self-monitors with unfavorable attitudes towards it. Snyder and Kendzierski (1982) attributed these findings to the idea that low self-monitors habitually gravitate towards social situations that dispose them to behave in ways that reflect their attitudes and instinctively avoid those situations that may cause them to go against their true attitudes.

Because low self-monitors strive to stay in attitude-congruent situations, they may have less need for the self-presentational skills that high self-monitors require. Also, their choices of situations help defend and perpetuate their conceptions of self, as being in situations with people that support their attitudes and behaviors gives further evidence

that they are as consistent as they believe they are (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982). Snyder and Kendzierski's (1982) study also lent support to the idea that high self-monitors do not value the consistency between their public actions and private actions as much as low self-monitors do. This study ultimately showed that high and low self-monitors do not only differ in the importance of the congruence of their attitudes and behaviors, but also in the types of situations they choose to put themselves in.

Klein, Snyder, and Livingston (2004) more recently assessed the relationship between self-monitoring and the expression of prejudice in a public context. Based on Snyder and Tanke's (1976) earlier research, Klein et al. (2004) predicted that high self-monitors would express more prejudiced attitudes in front of a prejudiced audience rather than in front of a tolerant audience, since high self-monitors tend to express attitudes that are consistent with their audience's. They also hypothesized that low self-monitors would not be affected by the audience's attitudes, as they are less likely to act based on the given situation.

This study took place in two parts. In the initial session, the participants filled out a series of questionnaires, including a self-monitoring scale and a measure of attitudes towards homosexuals. Participants were told that the second phase was concerned with their perceptions of gay couples, with two-thirds of the participants being told that, just after expressing their thoughts, they would have to share their answers with a group. One-third of participants were told that the group's attitudes were described as favorable towards homosexuals, and one-third were told that the group had unfavorable attitudes towards homosexuals. The researchers found support for their hypothesis, with high self-monitors showing a greater likelihood of expressing an attitude consistent with their

anticipated audience. The participants who were low self-monitors were unaffected by their audience. Klein et al. (2004) attributed these findings to the desire for social appropriateness that most high self-monitors show, which causes them to adopt the group attitudes of others in order to fit in with their audience. These results fit in with the idea of social desirability, but they also support Cohen et al.'s (2009) research on in-group biases and Renkema et al.'s (2007) study on conformity.

For people with high self-monitoring levels, the confidence with which their beliefs are held varies depending on whether others share or disagree with their critical beliefs, which is similar to the effects on the cultural anxiety-buffer in terror management theory. Thus, there is a rational connection between terror management theory and self-monitoring. A person's worldview consistently provides him or her with a framework concerning the meaning and order of the universe, and is usually what informs a person as to what his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors should be. Rosenblatt et al.'s (1989) and Greenberg et al.'s (1990) studies demonstrate how terror management necessitates having a strong set of worldviews. Similarly, Snyder and Tanke's (1976) and Snyder and Kendzierski's (1982) studies emphasize how individuals use their attitudes as guides to how they should behave in different situations.

Based on prior research conducted on both terror management theory and the individual personality trait of self-monitoring, I propose the idea that self-monitoring levels can impact terror management mechanisms, and can affect individuals' levels of religiosity. Mortality salience conditions invoke a desire for self-preservation, which may lead to conformity and the changing of a person's attitudes and beliefs. Specifically, I hypothesize that when faced with the idea of their own mortalities, low self-monitors will

tend to strengthen their religious beliefs, while high self-monitors will not. I do not expect to find any differences between high and low self-monitors within the control condition.

Method

Participants

100 undergraduates at Union College took part in the study either in partial fulfillment of a course requirement or for monetary compensation.

Procedure

Participants who volunteered to participate in this study entered the room and were told that the study was investigating their levels of religiosity and also how they would react to different situations they were put in. They were then given an informed consent sheet to sign. After signing it, they were asked to complete a series of written tasks. The first was a questionnaire, called the Personal Reaction Inventory, which assessed the subject's self-monitoring level (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986; Appendix A). Next, participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions with their initial, gut-level responses. Those randomly assigned to the mortality salience condition were asked to describe the emotions that the thought of their own death aroused in them, and also what they thought would happen to them as they physically die and once they are physically dead (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1989; Appendix B). The subjects who were randomly assigned to the control condition were asked to describe the emotions that the thought of dental pain aroused in them, and what they thought would happen to them as they experience dental pain and after they experience dental pain (Appendix C).

After writing their responses, participants were given a questionnaire with a number of words that described different feelings and emotions and were asked to indicate how often they had experienced each emotion in the past few weeks. This task was not relevant to the study, but gave the mortality salience condition time to set in (Rosenblatt et al., 1989; Cohen et al., 2009). Participants then answered a series of questions concerning their religious beliefs, practices, and attitudes. The questions were from a combination of different scales, including the Duke Religion Index (Questions 1-5; Koenig, Parkerson, & Meador, 1997), the Religious Well-Being Scale (Questions 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982), the Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religiosity Scale (Questions 38, 40-47, 49, 51; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), and the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Questions 52-61; Plante & Boccaccini, 1997), that measure the degree of one's religiosity (Appendix D). For each scale, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they personally agreed or disagreed with each statement, on a 1 (they strongly disagree) to 6 (they strongly agree) Likert-type scale. Participants then answered four demographic questions, including their gender, age, expected year of graduation, and their religious affiliation. Finally, the participants were given a debriefing sheet and were thanked for taking part in the study.

Results

Participants' scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale were calculated. Using the guidelines suggested by Snyder and Gangestad (1986), those with scores between 0-10 were categorized as low self-monitors. Those with scores from 11-18 were categorized as high self-monitors.

As the religiosity scales were of different lengths, the average score on each scale was computed by dividing each participant's score by the total number of items in the scale. The average scores were then added together to form an overall religiosity index (Cronbach's alpha for the combined measure equaled .90). Scores on this religiosity index were then submitted to a 2 (high or low self-monitor) x 2 (experimental condition) ANOVA. Results indicated that there was no effect of condition, $F(1, 71) = .210$, $p = .648$, such that the post-manipulation religiosity scores of those in the mortality salience condition ($M = 15.74$) did not differ from those in the control condition ($M = 15.31$). There was also no effect of self-monitoring, $F(1,71) = 1.399$, $p = .241$, such that post-manipulation religiosity scores of high self-monitors ($M = 14.75$) were not significantly different from those of low self-monitors ($M = 16.33$). Importantly, the condition x self-monitoring interaction, $F(1, 71) = .266$, $p = .608$, was also not significant, although the pattern of means was in the predicted direction (Graph 1).

Discussion

Prior research conducted on terror management theory suggests the importance of having a strong worldview or cultural perception of reality that can serve as a buffer against the overwhelming, crippling terror and anxiety that are a result of becoming aware of one's own mortality (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). In order for this buffer to remain effective, a person must constantly bolster it and protect it from threats. Thus, people tend to seek social validation and respond positively towards those who reinforce and validate their worldviews (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). One aspect of this buffer that has been extensively studied is religion. Rosenblatt et al. (1989) suggested that there is a master motive behind religion, and that religious beliefs actually increase a person's cultural

anxiety-buffer. People become more motivated to maintain their faith as their mortalities become salient, and religion is just one thing that people use to alleviate some of the terror they experience when thinking about their own deaths. People placed in mortality salience conditions tend to reaffirm their beliefs and endorse their worldview more strongly after the manipulation (Friedman, 2008).

The individual personality variable of self-monitoring also requires a strong, unvarying worldview. Self-monitoring allows a person to use his or her attitudes as guides for his or her behaviors. High self-monitors tend to rely on the situational information that is available when deciding how to act in a particular social setting. In contrast, low self-monitors use their own personalities and attitudes to decide what behavior would be socially appropriate for the situation (Snyder & Tanke, 1976). Low self-monitors place more emphasis on making their attitudes and behaviors congruent and consistent, while high self-monitors do not feel that their attitudes and behaviors have to be the same at all times (Zanna et al., 1980). A person's self-monitoring level helps determine how much he or she is going to rely on his or her cultural worldview when choosing how to act and what to believe in different situations.

In both terror management theory and self-monitoring, individuals rely on their cultural worldviews to provide the world around them with meaning, order, and value. Worldviews also allow people to acquire a sense of value within their unique cultures (Greenberg et al., 1990). These worldviews are fragile, and must receive constant social validation in order to continue functioning properly. Unconscious processes are at work, but cultural worldviews manage to permeate every aspect of a person's life. In terror management theory, people use their cultural worldviews as anxiety buffers against terror

that results from contemplating their own deaths. In self-monitoring, people use their worldviews to varying degrees to decide how to act in various situations. The confidence with which high self-monitors hold their beliefs varies depending on their audience. Similarly, in terror management theory, the cultural anxiety-buffer is bolstered when others share similar beliefs and undermined when others disagree. Thus, the connection can be made that self-monitoring levels can impact terror management mechanisms, consequently affecting individuals' levels of religiosity.

The results of this study were not significant, but they were in the predicted direction. Low self-monitors in the mortality salience condition had higher post-manipulation religiosity scores than low self-monitors in the control condition and high self-monitors in both conditions, although the difference in scores was not large enough to be significant. The results indicate that people's self-monitoring levels have the potential to moderate terror management mechanisms, showing the link between the personality variable of self-monitoring and terror management theory. Low self-monitors tend to be more religious than high self-monitors (Klein et al., 2004). The difference in post-manipulation religiosity scores between low self-monitors in the control condition and those in the mortality salience condition was greater, indicating that the pattern of means was in the right direction.

Much research has been conducted on both terror management theory and on self-monitoring. However, no research has been done to combine the two in order to identify any significant interactions between them. The purpose of this study was to see what impact the combination of mortality salience and self-monitoring might have on a person's level of religiosity. The hypothesis was that low self-monitors in the mortality

salience condition would have higher post-manipulation scores than low self-monitors in the control conditions, but that no differences would exist between high self-monitors in the control and mortality salience conditions. This hypothesis was not wholly supported, as the results of the interaction between self-monitoring and condition were not significant, but they were in the right direction. The mortality salience condition seemed to have more effects on low self-monitors, and no true differences between high self-monitors.

An important implication of the current research is the fact that it proposes the idea that self-monitoring, a normally undetectable and seemingly harmless characteristic, can have such a direct impact in determining how a person reacts to something like thoughts of his or her own death. This study was conducted on college students, but it has implications for people of all ages. It would be useful for parents or teachers to know if their children or students were high or low self-monitors, as it may impact their responses to things that make their mortalities salient, like movies, television programs, or newspapers. Being reminded of one's own mortality is a daily part of life, but may be more detrimental to some people than others. Personality traits play a key role in the understandings and judgments of daily interactions, and incoming information may be more injurious for some people than others depending on their self-monitoring level.

Also, the cultural worldview that a person holds informs every part of his or her life. Some worldviews may require more social validation and bolstering, while others may be able to withstand higher levels of opposing, contradicting information. Both terror management theory and self-monitoring have implications for in-group biases and out-group hostilities. These in-groups need to be carefully monitored to ensure that

dislike and aversion towards the out-groups do not get out of hand. High self-monitors may be able to alter their behaviors in order to fit in with their current audience. However, low self-monitors are often unable or unwilling to cause a discrepancy between their actions and their true attitudes, and mortality salience usually causes people to strengthen their cultural worldviews. These worldviews need to be observed so that in-group biases are not amplified to prejudices or outright discrimination.

One of the main limitations is that this study consisted of a small sample from a relatively homogenous college. The problem with a small sample size is that the results do not have a lot of statistical power. There were not a lot of participants in the study, decreasing the amount of statistical strength present and increasing the risk of a type-2 error. A larger sample would give the study more statistical strength and would most likely eventually become significant, as the pattern of means from this smaller study was in the right direction. The problem with a homogenous sample is that the results may not be generalizable to everyone at the college or to the population at large. College students may be less religious than other groups due to their current level of development. Another limitation is the fact that the filler task that was supposed to give mortality salience time to set in may not have been long enough. Rosenblatt et al. (1989) found that it usually takes three to five minutes for subjects to show effects of mortality salience. However, students in the current study tended to rush through the tasks, and many completed this filler questionnaire in about two minutes. Thus, including a longer or additional questionnaire may cause subjects to slow down, giving mortality salience time to set in and allow the appropriate terror management mechanisms to be activated.

Future research should examine whether the same effects are found across different religions or in different countries. Some religions may emphasize conformity with all their doctrines and rituals, making it less likely that a follower will have a strong worldview for him or her to fall back on. On the other hand, religions that stress the importance of conformity may lead to more principled followers who internalize the teachings of their particular religion. In this case, their attitudes would probably be less likely to change in the face of new information or other peoples' views that differ from their own. In terms of countries, some countries may simply be more used to war and strife than others, making the prospect of their own mortality and deaths less scary for their inhabitants. People in countries where disease, violence, and war are not prevalent may be less used to contemplating their own deaths, and therefore would be significantly more overwhelmed with anxiety and terror in the mortality salience condition. Inhabitants of more volatile countries would be more comfortable thinking about their own deaths, and the effects from the mortality salience condition would be less pronounced. Another area for future research could be looking at whether offering a way to cope with various assaults on one's cultural worldview would lead to less need for social validation and terror management mechanisms. If a coping strategy was offered, the impacts of bolstering or opposing information or views, especially opposing, may be less pronounced and the effects of terror management might not be so substantial.

Worldviews are the things that provide meaning for the world, and people search for ways to find support for their cultural worldviews every day. Being around people who differ in their worldviews is a part of life, but people still must find a way to bolster their worldviews in order to make them seem correct and valid. Self-monitoring is also a

way that people use their attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews to make sense of the world around them. Examining self-monitoring in conjunction with something like terror management theory is important, because receiving reminders about the potential for pain, aversive experience, and death is an inescapable part of daily life (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Self-monitoring is at work every time a person decides to voice a political opinion, adapt to a different crowd at a party, or buy a pair of shoes even though they have gone out of style. This study showed how some personality traits, like self-monitoring, can be enduring and can influence every part of a person's life. A person cannot always choose whether or not to take someone's opinion, judgment, or criticism to heart. The current study demonstrates just how intertwined terror management theory and self-monitoring can be, and that the cultural worldview that a person holds has an impact on new evaluations and plays a more important role in everyday life that people currently understand.

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Appendix A:

Personal Reaction Inventory

Directions: The statements below concern your personal reactions to a number of different situations. No two statements are exactly alike, so consider each statement carefully before answering. If a statement is TRUE or MOSTLY TRUE as applied to you, fill in the T, and if the statement is FALSE or MOSTLY FALSE as applied to you, fill in the F, (e.g. (T) (F))

(T) (F) 1. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people.

(T) (F) 2. At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things others will like.

(T) (F) 3. I can only argue for ideas that I already believe.

(T) (F) 4. I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.

(T) (F) 5. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain others.

(T) (F) 6. I would probably make a good actor or actress.

(T) (F) 7. In a group of people, I am rarely the center of attention.

(T) (F) 8. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.

(T) (F) 9. I am not particularly good at making other people like me.

(T) (F) 10. I'm not always the person I appear to be.

(T) (F) 11. I would not change my opinion (or the way I do things) in order to please someone or win their favor.

(T) (F) 12. I have considered being an entertainer.

(T) (F) 13. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting.

(T) (F) 14. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.

(T) (F) 15. At a party, I let others keep the jokes and stories going.

(T) (F) 16. I feel a bit awkward in public and do not show up quite as well as I should.

(T) (F) 17. I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end).

(T) (F) 18. I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them.

Appendix B:

On the following page are two open-ended questions, please respond to them with your first, natural response.

We are looking for peoples' gut-level reactions to these questions.

The Projective Life Attitudes Assessment

This assessment is a recently developed, innovative personality assessment. Recent research suggests that feelings and attitudes about significant aspects of life tell us a considerable amount about the individual's personality. Your responses to this survey will be content-analyzed in order to assess certain dimensions of your personality. Your honest responses to the following questions will be appreciated.

1. PLEASE BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE EMOTIONS THAT THE THOUGHT OF YOUR OWN DEATH AROUSES IN YOU.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. JOT DOWN, AS SPECIFICALLY AS YOU CAN, WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO YOU AS YOU PHYSICALLY DIE AND ONCE YOU ARE PHYSICALLY DEAD.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C:

On the following page are two open-ended questions, please respond to them with your first, natural response.

We are looking for peoples' gut-level reactions to these questions.

The Projective Life Attitudes Assessment

This assessment is a recently developed, innovative personality assessment. Recent research suggests that feelings and attitudes about significant aspects of life tell us a considerable amount about the individual's personality. Your responses to this survey will be content-analyzed in order to assess certain dimensions of your personality. Your honest responses to the following questions will be appreciated.

3. PLEASE BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE EMOTIONS THAT THE THOUGHT OF DENTAL PAIN AROUSES IN YOU.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. JOT DOWN, AS SPECIFICALLY AS YOU CAN, WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO YOU AS YOU PHYSICALLY EXPERIENCE DENTAL PAIN AND ONCE YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED IT.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D:

Religiosity Survey

This survey contains questions about various aspects of your religious faith and behavior. Please be assured that all of your responses will remain anonymous and strictly confidential. Neither the person collecting the surveys nor those who will analyze responses will ever know which survey you completed. Please answer all of the questions and please be honest and accurate in your responses.

1. How often do you attend church, synagogue, or other religious meetings?

_____Never
_____Once a year or less
_____A few times a year
_____A few times a month
_____Once a week
_____More than once a week

2. How often do you spend time in private religious activities such as prayer, meditation, or Bible study?

_____Never
_____Once a year or less
_____A few times a year
_____A few times a month
_____Once a week
_____More than once a week

For each item below, please use the following scale to indicate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with the statement.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly disagree Strongly agree

3. _____In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine

4._____My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life

5._____I try hard to carry my religion over into all other dealings in life.

6._____I was not very interested in religion until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life

.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly disagree Strongly agree

7._____I have been driven to ask religious questions out of a growing awareness of the tensions in my world and in my relation to my world.

8._____My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious convictions.

9._____God wasn't very important for me until I began to ask questions about the meaning of my own life.

10._____ It might be said that I value religious doubt and uncertainties.

11._____ For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious.

12._____ Questions are far more central to my religious experiences than are answers.

13._____I find religious doubts upsetting.

14_____As I grow and change, I expect my religious beliefs to also grow and change.

15._____I am constantly questioning my religious beliefs.

16._____I do not expect my religious convictions to change in the next few years.

17._____There are many religious issues on which my views are still changing.

18._____I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with god.

19._____I don't know who I am, where I came from, or where I am going

20._____I believe that God loves me and cares about me.

21._____I feel that life is a positive experience.

22._____I believe that God is impersonal and not interested in my daily situations.

23._____I feel unsettled about my future.

24_____I have a personally meaningful relationship with God.

25._____I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with my life.

26_____I don't get much personal strength and support from God

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly disagree Strongly agree

27._____I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in.

28_____I believe that God is concerned about my problems.

29._____I don't enjoy much about life.

30._____I don't have a personally satisfying relationship with God.

31._____I feel good about my future.

32._____My relationship with God helps me to not feel lonely.

33._____I feel that life is full of conflict and unhappiness.

34._____I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close communion with God.

35._____Life doesn't have much meaning.

36._____My relationship with God contributes to my sense of well-being.

37._____I believe that there is some real purpose to my life.

38._____I enjoy reading about my religion.

39._____I go to church/services because it helps me to make friends.

40._____It doesn't matter much what I believe so long as I am good.

41._____It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer.

42._____I often have a strong sense of God's presence.

43._____I pray mainly to get relief and protection.

44._____I try hard to live all of my life according to my religious beliefs.

45. _____What religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow.

46. _____Prayer is for peace and happiness.

47._____Although I am religious, I don't let it affect my daily life.

1 2 3 4 5 6
Strongly disagree Strongly agree

48._____I go to church/services mostly to spend time with my friends.

49._____My whole approach to life is based on my religion.

50._____I go to church/services mainly because I enjoy seeing other people I know there.

51. _____Although I believe in my religion, many other things are more important in life.

52._____My religious faith is extremely important to me.

53._____I pray daily.

54._____I look to my faith as a source of inspiration.

55._____I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life.

56._____I consider myself active in my faith or church.

57._____My faith is an important part of who I am as a person.

58._____My relationship with God is extremely important to me.

59._____I enjoy being around others who share my faith.

60_____I look to my faith as a source of comfort.

61._____My faith impacts many of my decisions.

Appendix E:

Demographics Survey

Your gender (circle): Male Female

Age_____

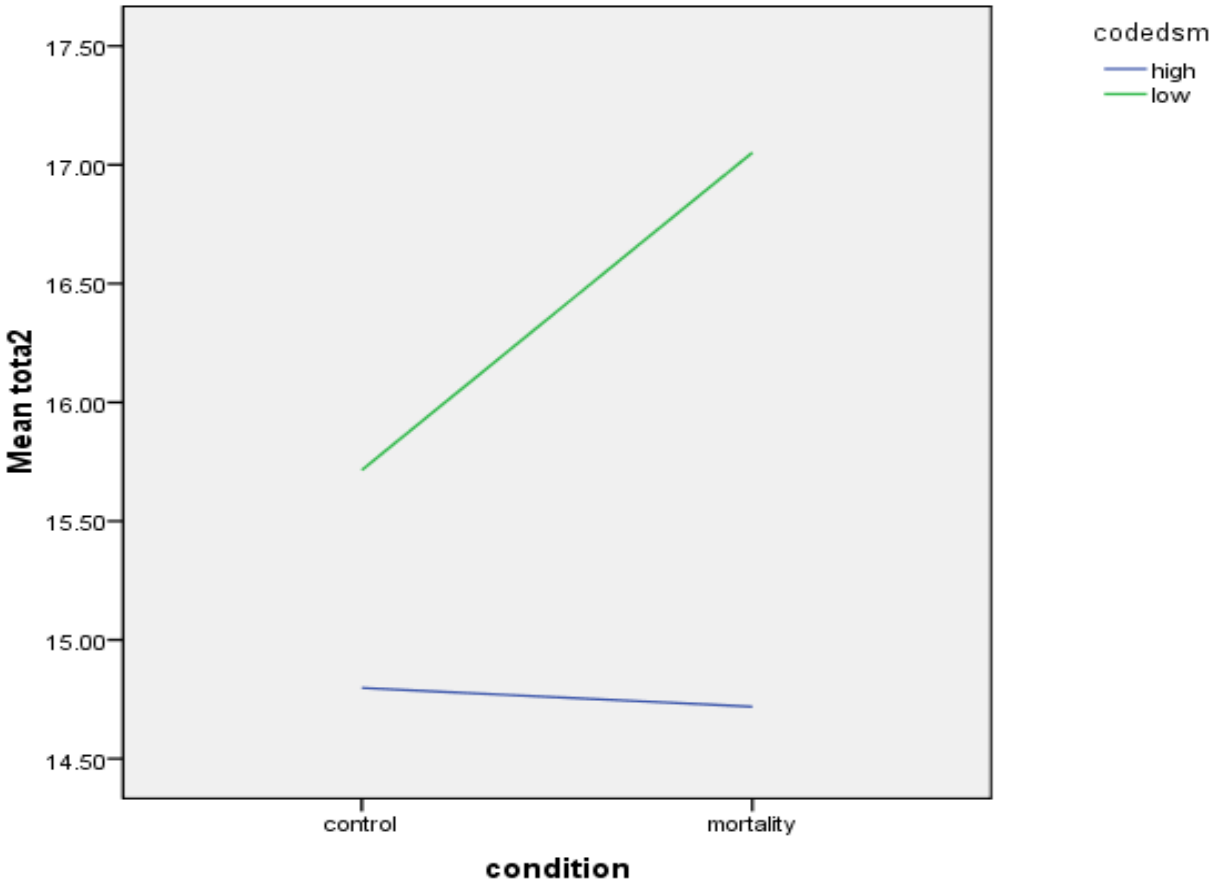
Expected year of graduation_____

Do you consider yourself (check most appropriate classification):

_____Catholic _____Protestant _____Jewish _____Muslim

_____Agnostic _____Atheist _____Other (please specify:)

Graph 1:


codedsm
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